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General Assembly
Twenty-third special session

Official Records

8th meeting
Thursday, 8 June 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 3 *(continued)*

Credentials of representatives to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

(b) Report of the Credentials Committee (A/S-23/7)

The President: The Assembly will now take action on the draft resolution recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 15 of its report (A/S-23/7). The Credentials Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution S-23/1).

The President: We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 3.

Agenda items 8 and 9 *(continued)*

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Tembé Ashira Assih-Aïssah, Minister for Social Affairs and Advancement of Women of Togo.

Mrs. Assih-Aïssah (Togo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to convey the warm greetings of the President of the Togolese Republic, General Gnassingbé Eyadema, and of the Government and people of Togo.

On behalf of the delegation that is accompanying me and on my own behalf, I also wish to express our satisfaction with the outstanding manner in which you, Mr. President, our guiding our work.

This special session of the General Assembly assumes special importance for the Government of Togo because it constitutes an additional milestone in continuing action by the international community to improve the situation of women and girls at the opening of the third millennium. In accordance with the commitments endorsed at Beijing, as well as with those undertaken through relevant international instruments, relentless efforts are being carried out to ensure harmonious and integrated development for women and girls through the creation of a more adequate environment which is favourable to luck and opportunity.

Ensuring for women full citizenship and fundamental rights on an equal footing with men has become one of the major concerns of our development policy. The commitments made have been reflected not only in the establishment of a National Committee for

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the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action, but also in the drafting of a national plan for action spread out over five years, which has seven priority areas that include education, health, women's rights and employment.

However, it must be emphasized that the promotion of the status of women necessarily requires the cooperation of men, partnership between the State and civil society and cooperation between the bilateral and multilateral development partners, particularly the United Nations agencies.

From this perspective, we have given priority to interdisciplinarity and interaction within the National Committee by integrating representatives of State structures, non-governmental organizations, women's association and United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This strategic choice has also strengthened solidarity and coordination and has allowed for a better vision of women's problems and related synergy of action.

Within that context, and parallel to the decentralization process under way in my country for many years, the National Committee to follow-up Beijing is linked on the prefectural and subprefectural levels to local committees made up of men and women of varying social and professional profiles. This national coverage has allowed for a real assumption of responsibility and effective community participation at the grass-roots level.

Allow me to report briefly on some of the progress accomplished in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action through our plan for action. This progress is undoubtedly insufficient, but it is tangible. I remain optimistic regarding its positive effects on the status of women and girls, in view of the political will of the Government of Togo to fight all inequality and injustice, and bearing in mind the firm and growing determination of women to free themselves from sexual discrimination and poverty.

Considering that illiteracy among women is one of the main obstacles to equality, development and peace, the Government of Togo has made the education of girls, functional literacy and professional training of women the spearhead of its plan for action. It is encouraging to stress that from the start the Government, in adopting specific measures, has determined clear and precise guidelines. Recourse to positive discrimination regarding education has thus become necessary in order to encourage the education of girls, particularly in rural areas. Another advantage of this measure is that it aims to fight early marriage.

Thus the Government of Togo has reduced the cost of girls' education at the primary level and at the same time has favoured granting educational scholarships to those who reach the university level. One can highlight here the complementary action of several development partners which, through special programmes, contribute to the improvement of the quality of scholastic infrastructure, teacher-training and the sponsorship of poor students in rural areas by granting them teaching materials, school supplies and uniforms.

Violence against women is a reality which no one can deny and must be fought at all costs, if we wish to establish a climate of peace and prosperity. This is why in our strategies we use innovative approaches to make the various social groups aware of the pressing urgency to end harmful practices against women's health, which constitute serious human rights violations.

In that regard, the Government of Togo took a courageous step in promulgating the law of 17 November 1998 banning female mutilation, of which roughly 12 per cent of Togolese girls and women are victims. Therefore, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Advancement of Women, together with the ministries of health, justice, the interior and security, in association with non-governmental organizations, has launched a broad information campaign to publicize this law.

Recently, we organized two days of study on violence against women for the traditional chiefs and regional directors and police headquarters.

At the same time, a vast awareness campaign is being carried out throughout the country to fight the traffic in and exploitation of children. Togo is pleased to have hosted, from 2 to 5 May 2000, the regional meeting of ministers from West and Central Africa on the rights of women and children, organized by UNICEF. This meeting, which launched the Global Movement for Children, put together a series of recommendations contained in the so-called Lomé platform.

Regarding strengthening women's economic power, the question of women's access to the means of production, such as credit, land, appropriate technology and in agriculture, is increasingly being addressed through the availability of microcredit to women. It is important to note that the Government of Togo has established a support programme for savings and loans and other cooperatives. In 1998, there were already 51 decentralized finance structures.

In the rural environment women's groups have a technical framework provided for through State structures and non-governmental organizations. Thus, here and there we are seeing mutual savings and loans cooperatives emerge that offer rural women opportunities to improve productivity and enhance their income.

With regard to women's dynamism, their sharp business sense and promptness in repaying their loans, the prospect of developing female entrepreneurship by creating small- and medium-sized businesses and a bank is attracting public attention. Studies are under way and will soon lead to concrete decisions.

At the political level women are aware that their effective participation in the management of public affairs is henceforth imperative, and thus so is the reinforcement of the fabric of women's associations through the establishment of networks.

The effective promotion of equality between men and women and the contribution to human development and lasting peace must take place through the implementation of sustained national policies favouring the access of young girls to education and training, strengthening the economic power of women, rigorous application of measures to eradicate violence imposed upon women and adoption of strategies involving the full participation of women in civic management.

However, it is important to recognize that as laudable as the efforts made by a number of countries may be, those efforts will certainly not achieve the goals set at Beijing without international solidarity. Let us all — Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society — make a commitment at the end of this special session to do everything possible so that the beginning of the third millennium will see women recognized at all levels. Let us ensure that, more than ever before, the status of women will improve and that, throughout the world, from the most remote hamlets to the largest metropolitan regions, women will no longer suffer from violence, the consequences of armed conflict, disease, illiteracy, ignorance and poverty.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency, Mrs. Tadelech Michael, Minister of Women's Affairs Sub-sector, Office of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

Mrs. Michael (Ethiopia): It is indeed a great honour for me, as head of the Ethiopian delegation, to address this body at the eagerly awaited Beijing + 5 special session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

I would also like to extend my delegation's sincere appreciation for all the preparations for this conference, in the context of which Ethiopia also had the opportunity to host the sixth African Regional Conference on Beijing + 5, held in Addis Ababa, from 22 to 26 November 1999.

Let me also convey the warm greetings of the women of Ethiopia, who exercised their election rights, as a result of which the whole month of May was marked by democracy and victory, thereby allowing the Government and the people of Ethiopia to refocus on development activities.

My Government reaffirms its commitment to advance the status of women by implementing all human rights instruments and relevant treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Ethiopia signed in 1981, as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Though Government institutions play a crucial role in the implementation of the national women's policy and the Beijing Platform for Action, it is recognized that non-governmental organizations and women's organizations also have a significant role in the successful implementation of the Platform. Strategies have also been developed for joint cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations through the Women's Affairs Office and non-governmental organizations. The strategies developed are focused on the areas of gender mainstreaming, advocacy, capacity-building, supporting grass-roots women's organizations and networking.

At the stage where we are now, mainstreaming gender in other sectoral development endeavours and promoting gender-specific activities are equally important, if it is really intended to bring change to the lives of the majority of women. Thus, attention and support must be given to gender-specific programmes as well.

In accordance with the commitment it entered into, the Government of Ethiopia has been making efforts for the realization of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which spelled out 12 critical areas of concern to be addressed by Member countries of the United Nations. Most of the issues raised and adopted as critical areas of concern have been considered and placed on the Ethiopian Government's agenda of top priorities, in keeping with our country's reconstruction and development programmes for matters such as poverty alleviation, food security, education, health and road sector development programmes.

With regard to poverty, in order to do away with the legacies of the past and improve the socio-economic situation of the people, my Government has issued sound policies and designed workable programmes. The first economic recovery programme, launched at the beginning of 1992 and, later, the five-year programme on development, peace and democracy have been implemented in the last five years.

Another form of a poverty-reduction adopted by the Government was the intensification of agricultural extension programmes by subsidizing appropriate agricultural inputs to small farmers. In addition, the disbursement of credits to the urban and rural poor was another step taken. Fifty per cent of the beneficiaries targeted were female heads of households and girls who had dropped out of school.

The Ethiopian Social Rehabilitation and Development Fund, which is funded mostly by bilateral and multilateral organizations, including the World Bank, mainly targets poor rural communities and has a special focus on women. The overall objectives of this programme are poverty alleviation through the provision of assets and services and capacity-building that includes managerial and technical skills. As a result of the actions taken from July 1996 to September 1999, a total of 9,915,643 people have benefited from the programme, out of which 4,922,087 were women.

Similarly, non-governmental organizations are playing a critical role in poverty-reduction development programmes, with the aim of improving the quality of life of rural people through income-generating activities, by promoting the contribution of women and by providing the necessary support to enhance their economic empowerment. Non-governmental organizations, organized under 10 microfinance institutions, are disbursing credit to the poor, with more focus being given to women. Out of the total number of beneficiaries of microfinance institutions, between 55 and 60 per cent are women.

With regard to education and training, the education and training policy and the designing of the education sector development programme are aimed primarily at distributing opportunities evenly, improving quality, increasing the enrolment rate and bridging the gap between male and female participation and male and female achievement in schools. So far, the results registered in the increase in female enrolment at all levels of education, in particular the rise in the gross enrolment ratio in primary schools from 20.4 per cent in 1994–1995 to 35.3 per cent in 1998–1999, have been very encouraging. Likewise, the total gross enrolment ratio has increased from 26.2 per cent to 45.8 per cent during the period under consideration. It was indicated that although the enrolment of girls increased at the primary, secondary and higher institution levels, the gender gap still exists and needs to be bridged further.

Similarly, the increase in the enrolment rate of girls in technical and vocational schools and in skills development centres, the increase in the literacy rate from 23 per cent in 1994 to 26.6 per cent in 1998, and the prevalence of high illiteracy among a large section of the population have been stressed. Moreover, there has been an increase in the number of schools, through the participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations, and affirmative action for female candidates who wish to join teachers' training institutes has been implemented.

At the same time, factors constraining the increase in the participation rate of female students were pinpointed, and were found to include: the attitude of parents towards girls' education; inaccessibility of schools, particularly in rural areas; inadequate funds for expansion of opportunities; lack of adequate teaching materials; and low quality of

education due to inadequate qualifications of teaching staff.

The dangers posed to the socio-economic situation of the country by the status of health — particularly the inadequacy of services, mainly in rural areas; major health problems of females, both directly and indirectly related to obstetric issues; effects of harmful traditional practices; and vulnerability to the HIV/AIDS pandemic — were highlighted. A survey has been conducted on harmful traditional practices, and an intensive campaign has been waged towards their eradication, with particular reference to female genital mutilation. The health sector development programme mainly emphasizes developing an equitable, affordable and acceptable standard for the health service system, with priority given to women and children.

The achievements resulting from the implementation of the health sector policy and the health sector development programme should be underlined. These include an increase in facilities through the participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations, and a broadening of the coverage of services. Consequently, mother and child health services and vaccinations have increased, while potential health service coverage rose from 45 per cent in 1994–1995 to 52 per cent in 1997–1998.

In view of the increased danger of HIV/AIDS, the Government, non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, women's groups and society at large are actively campaigning against the pandemic. The National Council on AIDS, under the chairmanship of the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, is tasked primarily with providing the necessary support to women and children so that they can protect themselves, and with giving assistance to those already infected, orphaned or widowed.

With respect to legislation, Ethiopia, as one of the founding Members of the United Nations, has ratified numerous conventions and declarations adopted at various times. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In its unwavering commitment to the protection of women's rights, as fully reflected in its constitution, the Government of Ethiopia has been making efforts to amend and eliminate discriminatory laws and practices imposed on the female population. The main areas of focus during the process of the revision and eventual amendment of family law have been discriminatory provisions in relation to marriage and family relations, such as marriageable age, conditions for concluding a marriage, the relationship of spouses and their roles in home management, as well as provisions with regard to choosing the place of residence, ownership of property, upbringing of children, divorce, family arbitration and the like. The measures taken so far to revise laws and prepare the ground for their enactment have been a step forward in improving the status of women in Ethiopia, although much more remains to be done.

With regard to women in decision-making, the guarantee of women's rights through the promulgation of the electoral law and the provisions contained in the constitution has created positive ground for the empowerment of women. It has been noted that the participation of women in casting votes during the previous election was high but that their representation in the respective offices and parliamentary seats was insignificant. The results of the 1995 elections showed that women's participation as candidates for parliamentary seats was very low. Based on the need for more empowerment of women, the creation of awareness and education on issues such as human and legal rights and women's capacity-building has been given high priority. Simultaneously, there is a need to further educate the public on the rights of females and on the role played by women in nation-building, as equal partners with men.

Taking account of those conditions, efforts to build the capacity of women in general, and of potential candidates in the election which took place in May 2000 in particular, were conducted through awareness-creation programmes at all levels. The women's committee in the House of Peoples Representatives, the women's affairs office and women's associations made concerted efforts to build the capacity of women to be elected and to vote in the election held in May 2000. Concurrently, awareness-raising programmes on gender issues, in particular in relation to women's constitutional rights, have also been conducted in various forums and at different levels, with a view to making the public more aware. The results have been viewed as positive.

A great deal has been achieved thus far, but much more remains to be done. We strongly believe that

peace is a prerequisite for development and equality. At a time when Ethiopia was fully engaged in development endeavours to bring to life a national economy that has been exhibiting a continuously declining trend for decades, my country became a victim of naked aggression two years ago. For more than two years, for the sake of peace, Ethiopia has persistently worked hard and has pledged to all peace-loving countries and organs that it would reverse this aggression and refocus its efforts on development. And again, for more than two years, Ethiopia has lived with humiliation, permitting almost half a million of its citizens, three quarters of them women and children, to live in deplorable conditions, simply because it wanted to give peace a chance.

Ethiopia has always fully respected the Charter of the United Nations, from the day it was signed 54 years ago. There are international rules and laws, and they are there to be followed by citizens of the world, whether they live in poor countries or rich. It is that equity before the law which big and small nations alike guarantee to respect when they join the world body, the United Nations, as Members. The United Nations should be an organization of principle and a genuine union which looks after and guarantees full respect for its Charter.

Nonetheless, Ethiopia, though betrayed by the implementers of international law today, as it was before, has managed to defend its sovereign territory through the sacrifices of the Ethiopian people, who have always stood in unison when such challenges arise, by forcing the aggressor to go back where it belongs.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Thebe David Mogami, Minister for Labour and Home Affairs of Botswana.

Mr. Mogami (Botswana): Botswana would like to thank the United Nations system and all Member States for their commitment to the advancement of women. We applaud all those who have made concerted efforts to bring about the convening of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, on the theme of "Women 2000: gender equality development and peace for the twenty-first century".

During the last three days, Member States and United Nations agencies have engaged in reflections on the progress, constraints and challenges experienced in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. I would therefore like to add Botswana's contribution to what has been said.

The preparation for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women provided an important opportunity to consolidate ongoing efforts to advance the cause of women in Botswana. The preparatory activities undertaken by the Botswana Government and women's non-governmental organizations led to a new collaboration between Government and civil society, which made it possible to identify six of the 12 critical areas of concern documented in the Beijing Platform for Action as priority issues. The six critical areas as adopted by Botswana women, in order of priority, are women and poverty, including women's economic empowerment; women in power and decision-making; education and training for women; women and health; violence against women and human rights; and the girl child, which cuts across the above five critical areas.

Women and poverty, including women's economic empowerment, is Botswana's first-priority national area of concern. Women in Botswana tend to suffer poverty and economic marginalization more acutely than men. A number of factors contribute to the differential in the experience of poverty and economic disadvantage between the two groups. These factors include legal and cultural norms that restrict women's access to, and control of, productive resources. Gender inequalities also exist in the education system, and this has a negative impact on poverty alleviation strategies. The Government has put in place poverty eradication policies and programmes in order to increase women's access to productive resources, such as credit, training and other resources. Non-governmental organizations also provide support to women's economic activities so as to improve their economic status.

On the issue of women in power and decision-making, Botswana recognizes that the participation of women in decision-making at all levels of public and private life is an important issue of human rights, as well as of the strengthening of the democratic process. In an effort to address the existing disparities, my Government has embarked on political education, social mobilization, lobbying and advocacy. Other partners, particularly the non-governmental organizations, network with political parties and their women's wings, so as to encourage political parties to endorse women's demands, which are included in their manifestos. As a result of these efforts, the representation of women in the Botswana Parliament

increased from 9 per cent in 1994 to a little over 18 per cent in 1999, while in the Cabinet it increased from 12.5 per cent in 1994 to a little over 23 per cent in 1999. The representation of women at the permanent secretary level in Government is presently 25 per cent.

The Botswana Public Service and the country's Central Bank are led by women. There are programmes in place to build women's leadership and management capacity, as well as affirmative action in the selection of specially nominated counsellors and members of Parliament. The major challenges in this area are the limited resources for campaigns and political education, prevailing gender stereotypes and the absence of a comprehensive affirmative action plan focusing on promoting gender equality at all levels.

Regarding the issue of education and training for women, Botswana is committed to the ideal of education as a basic human right. A free 10-year programme of basic education is in place. Our national policy on education has been revised, and vocational and technical education has been expanded to attract more women. The special education needs of young mothers are addressed by women's non-governmental organizations that provide young mothers an opportunity to complete their studies through secondary and tertiary levels. Major challenges in this area include limited day-care facilities, teenage pregnancy, low enrolment of females in science and technical education programmes and the unavailability of teachers who are sufficiently trained and sensitized to deliver the new curriculum.

In the area of women and health, it is important to note that one's health and well-being are an outcome of the economic, social, political and cultural context. In Botswana's case, for example, negative cultural norms and practices still restrict women's capacity to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health, as well as regarding available health-care services. Nevertheless, Botswana has made some strides in this area of women and health. Since 1995, Botswana has revised the family planning guidelines, with the aim of removing impediments to health services for women and girls. There is also an integration of sexually transmitted disease and HIV/AIDS prevention with family planning services and a reduction of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. There has been increased attention on adolescent sexual and reproductive health, as well as an improvement in health information, which has resulted in a reduction of teenage pregnancy.

Violence against women is one of the pervasive and escalating social problems in Botswana. In trying to overcome the problem, the Government recently carried out a study on the socio-economic implications of violence against women on the basis of which a multi-sectoral approach will be taken to confront and overcome this evil. Among the several measures undertaken by Botswana with regard to violence against women are the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1996; the amendment of the Penal Code Act, which has improved laws relating to rape; the establishment of a shelter for battered women; and the establishment of the Botswana police and non-governmental organization task force on domestic violence.

In 1997, the Botswana Government commissioned a review of all the laws that discriminate against women with a view to amending them. In order to enhance the implementation of the six critical areas, Botswana had to put in place institutional mechanisms, and these include the elevation of the National Gender Machinery to the status of a full-fledged Department, the promulgation of a National Policy on Women in Development, the formulation of the National Gender Programme Framework, the strengthening of the Women's Non-Governmental Organization Coalition and other civil society organizations dealing with gender issues and the formation of the National Council on Women and its subcommittees focusing on the six critical areas of concern.

The general perception of the advancement of women has changed significantly in the last five years. This is a result of gender-awareness-building efforts, which include international bodies.

In conclusion, Botswana remains committed to the Beijing Platform for Action. We will do everything possible to pursue the implementation of the Platform to its logical conclusion. We hope that this session, which is very important to all of us, will produce an outcome document that will further strengthen our resolve to implement the Platform for Action.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jerzy Kropiwnicki, Minister, Head of the Government Centre for Strategic Studies of Poland.

Mr. Kropiwnicki (Poland): Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the high office of President of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. I would also like to express my delegation's respect and appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

In the opinion of the Government of the Republic of Poland, this session constitutes a significant step in promoting the development of nations and States, as foreseen by resolutions adopted in Beijing in 1995.

Having emerged from a long and difficult process, the agreement reached five years ago in the shape of the Platform for Action was a product not only of our common commitment and imagination, but also of our willingness to make necessary compromises. Today we are participating in the Beijing review conference, which has been convened to learn how successful we have been in our efforts to meet the standards agreed upon five years ago and to reconfirm our pledge to make further progress in carrying out decisions taken in Beijing. The eventual success of this endeavour of ours is contingent upon universal respect for every human being. This in turn entails, first and foremost, acknowledgement of the dignity and equal rights of men and women in all spheres of life. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland creates the framework in which these equal rights in social life are fully respected.

It is in the family that a human being finds his or her natural environment. It is into the family that successive generations are born and in the family where they grow in wisdom and learn how to reconcile individual rights with social obligations. The right of parents to raise their children in the family, as well as their right and primary obligation to educate them, should therefore be respected. Consequently, increased support should be offered to mothers and fathers who struggle to balance the demands of work and family responsibilities.

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland is rooted in the strong conviction that the law must protect human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. Hence, Polish law ensures medical, social and legal care for pregnant women. In its concern for the appropriate development of the family, the Government of the Republic of Poland has created the National Pro-family Policy Programme, which strives to strengthen the foundations of family life and provide health care at every stage of life, as well as education for young people that emphasizes respect for natural and social human rights. Family assistance centres — part of the national social services — have been established at the local level. Taking on violence against women, which, though marginal, has an enormously destructive moral impact, figures among the tasks of these centres.

The National Health Programme that has been implemented in Poland is aimed at holistic health promotion, including the prevention of diseases and disability, as well as effective treatment for life-threatening diseases, particularly cancer and those diseases that affect the cardiovascular system. Moreover, health programmes have been introduced to improve the effectiveness of women's sexual and reproductive health care. Positive effects of these actions have already been observed. For instance, there has been a decrease in mortality caused by cardiovascular diseases, a drop in the number of infants born with low birth weight and a reduction in the number of HIV/AIDS infections.

The right to education is regarded as one of the fundamental human rights. The laws concerning the Polish education system ensure equal access to schools for all citizens. Gender equality is strictly observed at all educational levels. In fact, at the moment, more women than men are being educated at university level. The reform of the education system, as currently implemented in Poland, has resulted in important changes being introduced into curricula. In the reformed system, schools will provide students with the opportunity for the comprehensive development of their personalities, including the development of their physical, emotional, intellectual, moral and spiritual potential.

The Polish labour code is founded on the principle of equal rights for men and women in the field of professional activity. Similarly, the civil code guarantees equal rights for both genders in its area of application. Positive changes are being manifested in the increasing number of women who occupy managerial positions in economic and public life. However, there are some indications that equality between women and men in the labour market has not yet been achieved. This relates both to opportunities for finding a job and to the level of earnings. Efforts are being undertaken to reduce unemployment and to

improve attitudes vis-à-vis women in the labour market.

With regard to the legislative sphere, the right of women and men to equal working conditions and to equal remuneration is being gradually adjusted to the standards of the European Union.

The principle of solidarity has borne much fruit in Poland. The citizens have regained their freedom, and the country has won back its sovereignty and independence. Democratic institutions and mechanisms are constantly being developed. These profound changes, coupled with the rising standard of citizens' education, are contributing decisively to the development of political activity and other forms of social life. Against this background, one can expect the vital role of women in society to continue to grow.

I am pleased to inform this body that Poland has ratified all fundamental international legal instruments pertaining to human rights and fundamental freedoms, many of which refer specifically to the rights of women. In undertaking all the efforts that I have just outlined, Poland continues to believe that a pure and unbiased concept of the dignity of the human person constitutes the very foundation of culture, serves as the main source of the well-being of individuals and societies and is a prerequisite for the development of nations.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. María Fernanda Flores de Alemán, Coordinator of the Social Cabinet of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Flores de Aleman (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour for me to be able to stand in this Hall, which represents the commitment of the nations of the world, united in the most noble cause of humankind.

From the Headquarters of this union, which began more than half a century ago, we declared collectively, for the first time, the recognition of the fundamental rights and dignity of the human being and the value of the person, as well as the equality of those rights for men and women and for nations large and small.

Within this magnificent tradition, we are meeting once again in this important forum with the purpose of continuing to work to make that equality a reality for half of humankind: women.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, Nicaragua has joined other nations in undertaking a new course, making greater efforts to advance the cause of women. It is in this spirit that, today, we are meeting the challenge of gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century by undertaking this five-year review of the Platform for Action.

Gender equality is the logical consequence of the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family, in the fine words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and constitutes the true basis of freedom, justice and peace. Equal dignity and rights must result in equal opportunity for all and clearly constitute a parameter of human freedom, without which there can be no rule of law or true democracy, which requires the participation of all.

We understand and desire the full participation of women as the freedom that every woman should enjoy in order to play a role in all professions, activities and spheres, without prejudice, to achieve personal progress, and to contribute to social, economic and political development.

Aware of all this, and recognizing that the Platform for Action is considered to be an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women, the State of Nicaragua, given its limited resources, has prioritized six of its twelve areas of critical concern. Our priorities are poverty, education, health, violence, institutional mechanisms and the girl child.

We are working hard against the feminization of poverty. We have developed mechanisms, plans and programmes to ensure the effective access of women, on an equal footing, to consumer goods. Nicaragua recognizes the right of women to own property and, under its Constitution, protects their right to receive equal pay for equal work.

By strengthening the institutions that govern and promote small and medium-sized enterprises, we have supported women throughout the country in obtaining credit and the training they need for empowerment. In this effort, priority has been given to rural women.

We have made a special commitment to education because we recognize that all deep changes in a country's social structure begin with education. Education is the sine qua non of sustainable development. Through its educational policy,

Nicaragua ensures access to education and training within its means to ensure the full participation of women in the process of social, economic and political development. Women have been given priority in the process of eliminating illiteracy, while the gender perspective is the main axis of the academic curriculum in public education.

The issue of health, which affects women in particular, is addressed systematically through what is known in Nicaragua as the Fourth Health Policy. The Policy caters to the different needs of the sexes at every stage of life. One result of comprehensive health care for women is that primary out-patient care now reaches 82 per cent of the female population.

The promotion of breastfeeding and the prolonged efforts of government policy contributed to the recent approval of a law on breastfeeding, which protects mother and child during the lactation period, guaranteeing the conditions and time necessary, even during working hours. Moreover, infants and lactating mothers are protected by a policy on nutrition.

We have a network of basic centres run by women, where care for sexual and reproductive health is available and information on and access to family planning are offered. There is also a hospital for elderly women.

With regard to violence, Nicaragua has advocated the formulation of a policy aimed at the gradual eradication of domestic violence, with special priority for women, adolescent and child victims of this painful problem. We are drafting a national plan against violence that will guide intersectoral action, with the participation of civil society and the State.

The Government of Nicaragua, represented by the Minister of the Family as a governing body through the Nicaraguan Institute for Women, is working for the advancement of women and has developed measures aimed, *inter alia*, at mobilizing and training women leaders in the various political parties; training personnel to run workshops on leadership and personal efficiency in the area of violence; implementing legislation on children and adolescents; finding alternative sources of credit; and promoting the gender perspective.

Children, our promise for the future, are today the most vulnerable members of the population. Nicaragua protects the life of girls and boys from the moment of conception, without any discrimination whatsoever and with a view to a more just world of equal opportunity from the earliest age.

Nicaragua has taken decisive steps to define and protect the rights of girls and boys. It has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is written into our Constitution. In 1998, we adopted the Law on Children and Adolescents; since then, we have developed many policies, actions and mechanisms to follow up this important legal instrument.

The attitudes promoting equality, development and peace begin with the values that are learned in the family. The Vienna World Conference on Human Rights effectively emphasized this fact, referring to the rights of children and stating that the full and harmonious development of children's personalities requires them to be reared in a family context, which therefore deserves greater protection.

We cannot disassociate women from the family. Nicaragua has a Ministry of the Family to coordinate action to protect and strengthen that fundamental nucleus of society. Thus, we have tried to implement the guidelines of the 1995 Platform for Action on recognizing the contribution of women to family well-being, the social significance of motherhood and the role played by parents in raising their children. The Nicaraguan State wishes to strengthen family ties for the good of all society.

We are pursuing all these efforts optimistically and enthusiastically. The Government of President Arnoldo Alemán intends to keep on working for women with a comprehensive approach to their welfare that covers all aspects of their being and all their public and private relationships.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Jytte Andersen, Minister for Gender Equality of Denmark.

Ms. Andersen (Denmark): Let me first of all express my Government's full association with the statement made by Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

We can be proud of the results of the United Nations world conferences on women. Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi and Beijing have made a difference. The Beijing Platform for Action is a strong forward-looking document, but we must keep moving

forward. No setbacks can be allowed. Only then shall we provide hope for women — hope for those women who experience a lack of respect for their human rights, violence outside or inside their homes; a lack of influence over their lives and bodies; a lack of decision-making power; a lack of access to education; and a lack of coherence between working life and family life.

Gender equality is still not a reality. Progress is too slow. We must focus on action. The political will to push the process forward is not strong enough. We must try harder. We must fight poverty and we must focus on women, including the disabled. Poverty will remain if women are kept from credit, land, property, education or decision-making processes.

Women's contributions and opportunities must be fully realized. At Beijing we committed ourselves to mainstreaming gender perspective into all policies and activities. Mainstreaming is not about integrating women into existing structures. It is about changing those structures. Such changes are necessary if both women and men are to participate on an equal footing in the development of their society.

For too long men have been side-tracked in the process. Partnership or a new social contract between women and men is necessary. Such a contract should clarify women's contribution to the economy, as well as men's contribution to family life. Professional and family responsibilities must go hand in hand.

Let me highlight an area where progress is most important. Trafficking in women is one of the most degrading violations of women's human rights. A root cause of trafficking is almost always poverty. Women are looking for better lives, not least for their families. At a recent trial in a Danish court a witness, a young Latin American woman was asked why she had ended up as a prostitute in Denmark. She answered, "You have no idea of the level of poverty my family and I were facing."

Long-term development is needed to fight such trafficking. But other tools must also be utilized. International cooperation is vital to identify those behind the crimes. Traffickers must be punished and victims must be protected. Negotiations on a United Nations protocol on trafficking are taking place in Vienna. Let us make them a success.

Human rights instruments are imperative in the fight for women's human rights. All human rights must be respected, and human rights include reproductive and sexual rights.

I am pleased to announce that Denmark was the third United Nations Member to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It is my hope that other countries will soon follow. Women need the Protocol. The Protocol is a political signal that women's rights are human rights and that human rights are women's rights. Only by keeping women's issues on the agenda will we be able to make progress. Gender equality has not yet been fully achieved.

Tomorrow we shall recommit ourselves to the Platform for Action. We have come to New York to agree on further actions to strengthen and speed up the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Let us demonstrate our political will in action. Let us take important decisions tomorrow. Let us dedicate ourselves to the implementation of these decisions. Let us meet again in five years at the fifth United Nations World Conference on Women. Women around the world are waiting for us. We cannot let them down.

The President: I call on Ms. Zohra Guliyeva, Minister of the State Committee for Women's Issues of Azerbaijan.

Ms. Guliyeva (Azerbaijan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me, on behalf of the Government and the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan, to welcome all participants in this session and to wish us all a productive endeavour. I am confident that the decisions adopted at this session will be crucial for all women of the world at the turn of the century and of the millennium.

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing in 1995, continuing the Nairobi strategies, defined the problems and challenges facing women at the national, regional and global levels. The National Plan of Action of Azerbaijan was elaborated and adopted on the basis of the Beijing Platform for Action and is being implemented successfully in our country.

Today the region of the Caucasus is the focus of attention of the entire world, unfortunately, primarily as a flashpoint of conflicts and disputes. For those of us who faced the consequences of the armed conflict in

and around the Nagorny Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the magic word "peace" in the triad "equality, development and peace" determines everything else.

From this high rostrum, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Development Fund for Women for their assistance in organizing the Baku Regional Conference entitled "Women and armed conflict". In the first such visit since the outbreak of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, women's delegations from Armenia arrived in Baku to participate in the Conference. The women participants unanimously accepted the Baku Declaration, reflecting their belief that despite all the loss, pain and suffering that affected thousands of families, and the great number of refugees, we women should make compromises for the sake of our common future and for the achievement of a stable and just peace in the region.

This peace-building activity was followed by meetings of women's non-governmental organizations under the auspices of the American Academy for Education Development and Harvard University, in the framework of the "Women waging peace" initiative, the global network of women peacemakers.

At present, Azerbaijan is living in a state of neither peace nor war. After peace was achieved in the region, the women of Azerbaijan believed that one of the most important directions for developing the country and the region as a whole was the implementation of various programmes for regional cooperation. Among those programmes, the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transportation corridor project is of special importance. It is virtually the plan for restoration of the Great Silk Road. For us, the Silk Road is a significant part of our past, which is characterized by a high level of ethnic and religious tolerance and cultural and economic cooperation. At the same time, the Silk Road is a substantial part of our future, a path towards further development using the unique geopolitical opportunities of the Caucasus to create an economic, transportation and communication bridge between Asia and Europe.

However, all these plans have not yet been sufficiently reflected in the real lives of women of Azerbaijan. We are facing numerous problems common to all countries with economies in transition. The heavy burden of economic problems lies primarily on the shoulders of women. The situation is aggravated by the fact that there are almost 1 million refugees and displaced persons in our country, the majority of whom are women and children deprived of shelter, work and a means of subsistence.

The measures to alleviate this situation could include a microcredit programme, the establishment of women's banks, and special plans for women's economic empowerment with the cooperation of the relevant international agencies.

While underscoring the significance of the programmes for economic development, we also highly appreciate the fact that women are the majority in the workforce of the country's education system, in the public health sector and in culture. Women make up 9.2 per cent of the management of the municipal executive authorities. Women hold 6.2 per cent of positions in Government and constitute 30 per cent of the public administration. I would particularly like to point out that today the chairpersons of the country's Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals are women. We women occupy ministerial and sub-ministerial positions. We are at the head of departments in the Cabinet of Ministers and the Office of the President. As a result of the increased activity by women, the parliamentary elections held in Azerbaijan after the Beijing Conference secured 12 per cent of the membership of the supreme legislative body for women.

The national report that Azerbaijan submitted to the session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in January 1998 was a distinctive illustration of the country's implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. As the report pointed out, Azerbaijan promotes an equal rights policy for women at all levels. It is also worth noting that, constitutionally and legislatively, women in Azerbaijan are totally equal to men in rights. Moreover, draft legislation is being studied with gender expertise. At the same time, it is obvious that the transition from the policy of equal rights to the policy of equal opportunities indubitably requires additional efforts.

In that connection I would like to mention that the State policy on the advancement of women in society has been worked out and is being implemented throughout the country. This policy is yielding results. Among its accomplishments we can mention the institutionalizing of agencies that are directly

responsible for the advancement of women. The State Committee for Women's Issues was established. Meanwhile, a widespread network of women's non-governmental organizations is operating throughout the country. Generally, all this creates opportunities for the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform at the national level. The Fifth Congress of the Women of Azerbaijan, held in 1998, demonstrated the increased interest and potential of women to participate more actively in all spheres of life.

The great twelfth century poet, Mehseti Ganjevi, wrote sadly that it is a rare thing for women's dreams to come true. However, it is my strong belief that our dreams of real equality, development and just peace will eventually come true.

The President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Gladys Gutiérrez, Minister for Women's Affairs of the Dominican Republic.

Mrs. Gutiérrez (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first of all, Mr. President, to convey to you very warm greetings on behalf of the delegation of the Dominican Republic present here, which is comprised of both governmental and non-governmental members.

It is a fact that the Beijing Platform for Action has opened doors towards establishing modes of communication between societies and States that have begun to yield auspicious results. In that context, we are making strides in the long race to overcome the obstacles that prevent the development of women and their equal presence in the public life.

Changes have taken place in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as the adoption in most States of laws against domestic violence and the significant work carried out by the Special Rapporteur on this matter, the participation of women in elections for offices at the congressional, municipal and public administration levels, and the important changes in the civil and employment sectors.

In the international arena, it is also important to highlight the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its signing by many States, and the adoption, signing and ratification by a significant number of States of the International Criminal Court Statute that has a clear perspective on gender.

Remarkable achievements have been made with respect to the human rights of women, especially in the way they have been reconceptualized, in the acknowledgement that women's rights are human rights, and in terms of the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights as an integral part of human rights. In the Dominican Republic, the Beijing Platform for Action has been a key framework for improving women's lives and for broadening their prospects for growth.

Over these five years, we have pooled our wills and have achieved important changes, such as consolidating progress through the adoption, promulgation and application of laws and the establishment in 1999 of the office of Secretary of State for Women's Affairs, which is a high-level department responsible for State policy on women and for coordinating the implementation of policies for gender equality in all sectors. Those achievements are the result of joint work by the three branches of the State, women members of political parties, and non-governmental organizations. The growing participation of non-governmental organizations in many areas of Dominican public life has had a positive effect on basic issues, such as health and education, which have been the focus of special attention, especially in recent years.

Another fundamental advance has been the formulation of a national plan for gender equality, which includes the establishment of indicators and the identification of concrete results that will serve as a basis for the implementation and follow-up of the plan. Among our other important achievements are the decrease in maternal mortality, greater accessibility of services for mothers and children, the implementation of reforms, and the development of a new model for health care. In the Dominican Republic, we have also increased awareness about violence against women and about domestic violence in general, and have created specific mechanisms for combating such violence.

In the economic field, Dominican women have made tangible progress with our significant presence in areas such as food production, animal husbandry, the financial sector and micro-enterprises, and by working in the duty-free and industrial zones. Nevertheless, we still have varied challenges confronting us. A review of the accomplishments and the obstacles of the past five years shows that the accomplishments have often been legislative while most of the obstacles have involved

problems of implementation. Such difficulties constitute a major challenge in terms of optimizing coordination and follow-up of the application of laws and standards, especially regarding labour law and the services provided for women in various areas.

Most women continue to work at lower-paid jobs, in spite of the fact that women are a dominant presence at all levels of education. Moreover, most political parties are reluctant to adopt gender equality. Still, women's issues dominate debate by political organizations, a trend that has continued through three election cycles. In the last presidential election, a woman, Mrs. Milagros Ortiz Bosch, was recently elected Vice-President of the Dominican Republic, which is an encouraging sign that the political field is opening up to participation by Dominican women. We are pleased that legislation exists allocating 33 per cent of congressional and municipal positions to women. This victory was achieved thanks to the determination of women members of political parties and of non-governmental organizations.

Despite such victories, major problems still have to be addressed as a priority matter through ongoing training and consciousness-raising programmes for officials in all State departments, and through responsible State management of the implementation of all these processes. If we are to overcome our difficulties, we shall need continued, firm political will and a high level of commitment to change on the part of the relevant authorities. That is a key factor for sustained focus on implementation and coordination of policies to promote the advancement of women.

An imperative objective of the Dominican Republic must be to continue to strive for goals based on the Beijing Platform for Action. Thanks to the broad gender vision of our current Government, our country has become increasingly integrated into this globalized world and is taking positive measures for human development and for gender equality.

At the international level, it is important to make progress towards the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, towards the lifting of reservations concerning the Convention, towards the ratification of the Optional Protocol, towards the ratification of the Statute of the International Criminal Court and towards the strengthening and empowerment of national and international forums for women, notably the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

It is also important to maintain the link between the Platform for Action and the plans of action of other world conferences which made major contributions to the advancement of women, such as the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights and the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, to name but a few.

Moreover, political will must be pooled to address the issue of world poverty. Poverty must be eliminated if women are equally to enjoy the benefits of development.

The difficulties and obstacles which we have had to face in this five-year appraisal of Beijing constitute an important barometer for defining forward-looking strategies for women in the new millennium. Women of the entire world, here present, we must not retreat, we must not turn back, now that we have made such great progress towards the objectives of Beijing.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Janet Bostwick, Member of Parliament, Attorney General and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Bahamas.

Ms. Bostwick (Bahamas): My country, and particularly its women, enthusiastically welcomes the opportunity presented by this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to join the global community in a comprehensive review of the action we have taken for gender equality pursuant to the commitments we made at Beijing. Equally as important is the opportunity the session affords us to take the action that would enable us to build on our accomplishments, to chart a course that would ensure gender equality, development and peace in this twenty-first century. May I say, therefore, how honoured I am to participate in this critical post-Beijing review. Why critical? It is critical because for many, if not for most of us, men and women — but especially women — the road that has challenged us to convene this session was traversed over one or more obstacles of discrimination, prejudice, violence, abuse, exploitation, repression and poverty. Therefore, we all must be recognized as survivors of these obstacles to gender equality and as soldiers who still have a war to win, even though some major battles have been won. We continue to hold fast

and to respond to the call to arms that commands us to take decisive action to address the manifold problems set out in the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Yes, there has been obvious progress in the advancement of women through actions taken by Governments, United Nations system agencies and civil society. The United Nations Secretariat has documented such advances.

Fortunately, the Bahamas is among those countries that have demonstrated improvements in the status of women. This was affirmed in the 1999 United Nations *Human Development Report*. The report's gender empowerment measure, which surveyed the relative empowerment of women and men in economic and political spheres, ranked the Bahamas number 13 out of 174 countries. It ranked the Bahamas as number one in Latin America and the Caribbean, and as the leading country in the developing world for this indicator, surpassing even many developed countries. To bring even greater perspective to this achievement, in 1996, the gender empowerment measure ranked the Bahamas twenty-sixth but, in 1999, thirteenth.

The Bahamas is particularly proud of the enabling environment it has provided for its female citizens of all ages, at all levels of development and at all levels of society. The Bahamas has placed special emphasis on health, poverty eradication, education and training, violence against women and the greater enjoyment of civil and political rights. Of special note are increased polyclinics with free pre-natal, neo-natal and post-natal care; total Government funding of AZT treatment for HIV-infected pregnant women, which has reduced transmission rates from mothers to infants from 30 per cent to 10 per cent and significantly reduced infant mortality rates from HIV/AIDS infection; the provision of on-site day-care facilities, inclusive of trained nurses, for the Government's upgraded Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute, which now offers over 20 disciplines, all open to women; the establishment of a state-of-the-art 24-hour Early Child Care Centre and the expansion of kindergarten facilities to almost all primary schools; the extension of free lunch programmes to all Government schools; partnership arrangements with non-governmental organizations dedicated to the well-being of female victims of violence, as well as the construction of safe houses in confidential locations for battered women and their children; media campaigns and public relations activities to prevent violence against women; and a full-time domestic Court for child maintenance, in addition to another Court dedicated to the trial of cases of domestic violence and cases involving juvenile offenders. Also worthy of note, the Government of the Bahamas has established a constitutional commission, as a result of which expected changes to the Constitution will, *inter alia*, abolish discriminatory qualifications for the granting of citizenship to the spouses of Bahamian women and will also provide for the conferral of citizenship on the children of Bahamian women, irrespective of their place of birth. Already, legislative reform has resulted in the granting of permanent resident status to the spouses of Bahamian nationals on an equal footing.

There is also the imminent introduction of the Inheritance Legislation, which will remove the primogeniture rule and allow women to inherit equally with men. Further, the Employment Act of 2000, introduced during this legislative period, addresses, among other measures, equal pay for equal work, parental leave, minimum wages and minimum standards of work. The Act also increases maternity leave from 8 to 12 weeks. These initiatives will result in the removal from Bahamian law of all vestiges of gender discrimination.

The Government of the Bahamas has also announced its planned introduction of flexible working hours in the public sector so as to permit parents, especially women who are heads of household, to spend quality time with their families and to reduce the need for children to be left unsupervised after school, thereby running the risk of falling prey to social ills.

I reiterate that there have been achievements in many countries. Nevertheless, I submit that we must take an even closer look at these achievements. Who have, indeed, been the primary beneficiaries? Are these achievements broadly distributed throughout our Organization's membership, or are they generally confined to the countries which already had been making strides towards the advancement of women prior to Beijing? Those of us who are faring slightly better than others should not lose sight of the grim circumstances that millions of women continue to face worldwide. It is a sad and sobering reality that, because of measures imposed or conditions existing in certain countries, women continue to be deprived of basic and fundamental human rights, such as the right to education or the right to gainful employment.

Systematic rape, torture and abuse continue to be weapons of choice in armed conflict. The nefarious traffic in women and children continues to grow at an alarming pace, thus subjecting them to horrendous forms of sexual and economic exploitation. We cannot stand by in silence while women continue to be violated in this manner. At every opportunity we must denounce these ills and demand that there be universal respect for the rights of women.

Therefore, we must be very clear in the message that we are now sending to these women and children who continue to be victims of sexually motivated and/or gender-based violence, slavery, exploitation, abuse, harassment and discrimination. What are we saying to them, when our negotiations to forge consensus in this special session lead us backwards, even if to previously agreed texts? The current challenges are far more stark and acute, as the local and international news media document daily. Whether, five years after Beijing, our perspective is coloured by lenses which see predominantly more progress for, or more prejudice against, the advancement and improved quality of life of women, the concerns which have arisen since Beijing point to the fact that there are now new commitments which we must address, over and above our continuing obligation under the Beijing Platform for Action.

I wish, finally, to turn to another aspect of our challenge for gender equality, which goes to the heart of the objective to which we all aspire. I am referring to the misconception that, by definition, the advancement of women means the marginalization of men. We are not in a zero-sum game of either/or, in which women can advance only at the expense of men, and vice versa. There can be genuine and progressive development only with honest partnership between the two genders. Both religion and science imply this.

The message of this special session must be that equality with men applies not to a particular category of women, but to all women. In all our efforts, we must send a clear message, to supporters and opponents alike, that gender equality is a win-win situation which elevates both genders and our societies and countries.

The equality of men and women is not an ideal, it is a realistic goal. Therefore, we should all leave this special session with an unswerving resolve to set and implement effectively a collective agenda that, with genuine commitment, will keep us on the Beijing path. The Government of the Bahamas remains committed to this goal.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Cristina Muñoz, Minister for Women's Affairs of Paraguay.

Mrs. Muñoz (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to preside over the delegation of the Republic of Paraguay — a pluralistic and integrated delegation, including representatives of the Government and of non-governmental organizations — at this special session for the five-year follow-up and review of the Beijing Conference. I had the same privileged opportunity to head my delegation at that important Conference.

It would be useful to take this opportunity to reaffirm on behalf of the Government of National Unity, presided over by Mr. Luis Angel Gonzalez Macchi, and of the women of Paraguay, our commitment to democracy. Paraguay is fighting tenaciously to preserve, consolidate and strengthen its institutional democracy, with the effective participation of women — the guarantors of the process, which in turn, is enriching the democratic development of the international community.

With regard to gender equality, the efforts that we are making to abide by our commitments made in Beijing in implementing the Platform for Action have resulted in the National Plan for equality of opportunity for women, which is a key tool for incorporating gender perspectives in public policies.

We are also committed to reforming the State, with the objective of seeking greater efficiency in public administration.

While opening up marketing opportunities for many countries, the globalization of the economy has had different and negative effects on women. The reform and modernization of the State have become necessary for many of our countries, and it is therefore important to design effective policies to curb the increase in social and gender inequality. These are some of the issues that, in the light of the review of the Platform for Action, have of necessity emerged in our discussions, since poverty continues to be an unresolved issue on our common agenda.

After the Fourth World Conference, the women of Paraguay defined national priorities with a view to the implementation of the Platform for Action, sharing

responsibilities between the State and civil society. The result of this initiative was the establishment of the Tripartite Commission, made up of the presidency's Ministry for Women's Affairs, the Paraguayan women's network — a group of women's non-governmental organizations — and the United Nations Development Programme. Its goal is to fulfil the commitments that Paraguay entered into at Beijing and to follow up on achievements and obstacles.

Since the regional preparatory meeting, our delegation has been working to support the Lima Consensus in the firm belief that this special session of the General Assembly will ratify all of the commitments undertaken in Beijing and contribute new initiatives that will enable us to continue building a more equitable society.

Paraguay recognizes as fundamental the right to life, as well as the protection of the human rights of women, including sexual and reproductive rights.

We have made progress in legal reforms and in ensuring greater equality of opportunity in education. We are implementing the National Plan for equality of opportunity, which covers most of the areas for action in the Platform for Action. In December 1999, Paraguay signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which is currently awaiting ratification by our National Congress.

The Ministry for Women's Affairs, the governing body for gender equality, participates as an active member in the Council of Ministers, as well as in the Economic and Financial Policy Council and the Council responsible for social policy and for combating poverty. It thus operates at the highest level of government and brings a gender perspective to these decision-making bodies.

The Government has established a Council with responsibility for social policy and combating poverty, in which the social cabinet, trade unions, rural organizations and non-governmental organizations participate. Here, policies and activities aimed at creating a new model for development are developed in order to reduce existing social gaps, the rural sector being accorded priority.

An important step was the re-establishment of the National Council for reproductive health, which coordinates the Ministry of Public Health, where policies in this regard are orchestrated and focused. Furthermore, a National Commission to monitor health and maternal mortality has been created, while special out-patient programmes have been set up to arrange for mobile buses to reach suburban areas and rural settlements with the objective of continuing to reduce maternal and infant mortality, since maternal mortality is often linked to childbirth.

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

It is important to note that the Constitution of Paraguay clearly establishes, in article 61, that the State recognizes the right of people to decide, freely and responsibly, how many children to have and when to have them, as well their right to receive, in coordination with the relevant bodies, education, scientific guidance and the relevant services in this area, and that special programmes for reproductive and maternal and infant health will be prepared for needy people.

In the context of the National Plan for the Prevention and Punishment of Violence against Women, important measures have been taken to eradicate this scourge, which is a violation of the human rights of women. Among the legal reforms, we would point to the ratification of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women, signed in Belén do Para, Brazil, and the approval of new penal, trial and labour codes. We recently adopted a law on domestic violence, which establishes new centres for victims of violence through public institutions and non-governmental organizations.

We are implementing educational reform with a strategic plan known as "Paraguay 2020: Meeting the Educational Challenge"; a National Programme for Bilingual Education; and the General Law on Education, which seeks to establish the effective equality of the sexes and the elimination of all types of discrimination. PRIOME, an equal opportunity programme for women in education, is a joint action of the Women's Bureau and the Ministry of Education and is aimed at eliminating sexual stereotypes in the educational process by reviewing curriculums, training teachers and revising texts and supporting materials, incorporating the gender perspective throughout. The earliest results reflect an improvement in the rate of

girls graduating in basic, secondary and higher education and in school-attendance indicators.

The participation of Paraguayan women in popular elections has been improved by the application of a system of quotas in the lists of political parties, but these remain insufficient. We are completing ambitious research into women's leadership in Paraguay that reflects its quantitative and qualitative aspects. The Women's Bureau maintains an ongoing and dynamic relationship with international bodies and institutions, coordinating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a permanent presence in international forums. It also participates in executive commissions of important regional and international organizations and receives cooperation in the development of its programmes, undertaken in transparency and efficiency.

The implementation of the Platform for Action has been the supporting pillar of many of our actions. Its launch was an important learning process for all sectors involved, those of the State and of civil society alike, and its results have benefited all Paraguayan women.

In conclusion, we wish to point out that the qualitative development of our societies requires a greater investment of national and international resources. What better investment can the international community make than in the women of the world?

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Matthew Walter, Minister for Community Development and Women's Affairs of Dominica.

Mr. Walter (Dominica): I bring greetings from the Government and people of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

I consider it an honour and privilege to be permitted to address this special session of the General Assembly, convened specifically to re-examine the status of women as it relates to gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century. As Minister responsible for community development and gender affairs in the Commonwealth of Dominica, I take particular pleasure in being able to participate in the work of this great assembly of persons dedicated to the goal of achieving equity, justice and respect for women all over the world.

Our meeting here to assess the progress made towards the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is, in reality, recognition that the effects of decades of discrimination against and victimization of women could not be rectified in five years. Given the very intractable nature of the problems faced by women in society and the myriad exacerbating factors, there needs to be periodic review and constant focus on the commitment made in Beijing. This meeting also provides an opportunity to discuss and devise new strategies to deal with the impact of the new challenges and obstacles projected by globalization, trade liberalization, onerous debt burdens and the continuous decline in official development assistance.

Women and poverty is one of the critical issues addressed by the Beijing Platform for Action. In the Commonwealth of Dominica, as elsewhere, past practices raised barriers to women's equal participation in the country's economic benefits. The net result has been to relegate women to the lowest rung of the economic ladder. In an ameliorative effort, the Government of Dominica, through its Women's Bureau and other agencies, has embarked on a programme aimed at improving women's access to economic resources. For example, the Dominica Rural Enterprise Project, funded by loans from the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Caribbean Development Bank, directs loan funds to women farmers and poor households headed by women in rural areas. Further, increasing amounts of loan funds are being made to women by such agencies as the Special Project Assistance Team, the National Development Foundation of Dominica and the Agriculture, Industry and Development Bank with funds obtained from the European Union. The Women's Bureau has also been addressing the problem of poverty through training for income generation, setting up skills-training programmes in targeted areas.

In the more formal educational setting, boys and girls continue to have equal access to primary and secondary education. The latest statistics indicate that the number of girls attending institutions of secondary education exceeds the number of boys and the same holds true at the tertiary level, where our young women, aggressively seeking available grant and loan funds, are pursuing studies in a variety of disciplines.

Further, the Amendment to the Title by Registration Act that became effective on 1 January 1999 is one step in redressing the imbalance in the enjoyment of equal property rights by spouses, thus

providing an incremental measure of economic power and independence to women.

However, the negative impacts of globalization and trade liberalization tend to increase poverty in society, and among women in particular, seriously hampering our efforts at narrowing the economic gender gap. For instance, the economic well-being of women in Dominica is seriously threatened by the World Trade Organization ruling on bananas, which has resulted in a loss of income to farming and rural households, the sections of society least able to sustain an income loss. The magnitude of the exacerbation of the problem becomes apparent only when it is realized that women-owned and operated farms constitute 21 per cent of the banana production base. Women are further affected as spouses of male banana farmers.

We need to underscore the seriousness of the problem and we appeal to the international community, through this Assembly, to be mindful of the harm to people's lives and economic prospects that can result from the actions of international bodies.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action declares violence against women to be an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace and a manifestation of the unequal power relations between men and women. Accordingly, gender equality cannot be realized unless and until there is an end to spousal abuse in all its forms.

In dealing with this problem, the Commonwealth of Dominica has adopted a two-pronged approach of education and legislative action. There was a recognized need to raise society's consciousness and awareness of the extent and harmful effects of violence against women. Beginning in November 1997, the Women's Bureau and other women's organizations embarked on a one-year campaign denouncing violence against women through such organized activities as a march and rally, panel discussions, radio programmes and a locally produced television drama series entitled "Wake Up Call".

In 1998 and 1999, the Women's Bureau, in collaboration with the Department of Legal Affairs, conducted a series of three-month programmes of community education sessions on women and the law in eight districts of the country. Those sessions proved to be learning experiences for all parties involved. The programme organizers came away with an enhanced view of the need for legislative action to protect the rights of women in common-law relationships and for a legal aid programme designed to assist women in the enforcement of their rights.

In the area of legislation, the sexual offences act of 1998 has substantially increased penalties and sanctions for engaging in conduct proscribed by the act. The age of consent has been raised from 14 to 16 years. The draft provisions of a domestic violence act intended to deal with all forms of spousal and intra-family abuse are currently under consideration and intensive review.

The National Health Plan of the Commonwealth of Dominica contains programmes specific to the health needs of women and children, including a programme intended to reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child and an extensive family planning programme.

For many decades women have participated freely in the political life of our country. They have made important contributions to our governmental and political institutions at the highest levels, and we expect them to continue to add their unique texture to the cultural, political and economic fabric of our country. We recognize that the task of removing the remaining constraints to gender equality in Dominica is far from complete, but as a nation we are committed to ensuring that all citizens enjoy all the rights enshrined in our Constitution.

We believe, however, that in this national effort towards gender equality men must become more engaged and involved in the formulation of policies and the implementation of programmes geared to that end. In essence, we believe that such an involvement by men will help them acquire a more profound sense of the disabilities under which women are forced to operate in our society, and thus be better equipped to champion women's issues. It is on the basis of that belief that the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs has effected a change in the designation of the responsible agency from the Bureau of Women's Affairs to the Bureau of Gender Affairs, to afford men and women parallel participation and responsibility in achieving the goals of the agency, and as a step in creating an enabling environment for the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

As we strive to acquire a modicum of economic benefits for our people, we must necessarily accept the

validity of the proposition that sustainable development cannot be realized without the full engagement and complete empowerment of women. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women is not only the right thing to do; it is in our national socio-economic interest.

The Acting President: I must appeal to speakers to respect the seven-minute limit allocated for the statement of each State.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Běla Hejná, Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Ms. Hejná (Czech Republic): I am very honoured to take part in and contribute to this special session. The Czech Republic also ranks among the countries that have responded to the conclusions of the Beijing Conference and have endeavoured ever since the holding of the Conference to fulfil its objectives.

In the Czech Republic we are coming to the end of a period of essential social and economic change that has been necessary for the transformation of the country from a communist regime into a free civil society based upon democratic principles. Now that the whole economic and social system has been reorganized and new mechanisms have been successfully implemented, we must turn our attention to how those changes have an impact on the enhancement of the quality of life. We must also be mindful of the effect those changes have on the free formation of structural relationships and institutions of traditional civil society, the guaranteeing of the rights of the individual and the implementation of civil liberties.

Naturally, other related topics have become public issues, such as observance of the principle of civil justice, non-discrimination, the creation of new opportunities and the enhancement of the guarantees that are currently provided to citizens by their Government. Those tendencies are being addressed in governmental policy by means of strengthening the formal prerequisites for the promotion of civil rights, specifically through the process of finalizing internal institutional mechanisms designed to promote human rights and the process of strengthening of the principle of civil justice by means of enhancing the quality of the existing legal system. Both of these processes have a direct impact upon the equality of men and women, or the requirement to eliminate discrimination against women.

The existing traditional human rights institutions, which in the past in fact consisted of only the courts of justice, have been recently complemented by the Council of the Government of the Czech Republic on Human Rights and the post of Governmental Trustee for Human Rights, who at the same time acts as the Council's Chairman. In relation to the Government, both the Council and the Trustee have an advisory and initiative-taking status. Apart from governmental institutions, other stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations and the professional sector have permanent representation in the Council.

These already well-functioning bodies have now been strengthened by the office of the public human rights protector, the ombudsman, whose task is to monitor how, or whether, the public authorities observe the human rights of individuals. The ombudsman also monitors legislation aimed at ensuring civil protection. His or her role is to help remedy any wrongdoing in administrative procedure. The ombudsman usually acts on the basis of suggestions and complaints received from citizens, to whom he or she also gives basic advice.

Increasing public awareness of the gender equality principle and eliminating rigid ideas on the roles of women and men in society is a task we face on an ongoing basis. As we all know, this task is in itself very difficult. Solving this problem in post-communist countries became more complicated due to the fact that the negative impact of forced female emancipation — which began in the 1950s and resulted in almost 100 per cent female employment — still prevails.

For quite a long time women were compensated for these conditions by the artificial protection, artificial relief and benefits related to childcare. The sudden curtailing of that protection might become a socially sensitive issue, although it is a very costly affair which leads employers to prefer male job applicants. In our opinion, this seemingly deadlocked situation might be tackled by implementing a consistent policy of equal opportunities for both men and women, including the principle of equal treatment. A relatively new, and for the Czech public unusual, aspect is the application of the principle of gender equality, which promotes justice for both genders,

unlike the principle of civil neutrality that has been applied until now.

In conclusion, I would like to underline the key importance of international cooperation in formulating and promoting national policy for the sensitive area of equality for men and women. Thanks to this cooperation, and with the help of international legal instruments and valid international commitments, the Czech Republic has been quite successful in finding and adopting the fundamental ideas of a policy which, by its effect, we hope will bring members of both sexes a solid guarantee of their equal development and the opportunity to fulfil their vital aspirations.

The Acting President: I call on Ms. Maria Serkedjieva, Deputy Minister of Justice of Bulgaria.

Ms. Serkedjieva (Bulgaria): It is a great honour for me to be here today and to share with participants such a significant moment in our consolidated efforts towards gender equality and the advancement of women.

My delegation aligned itself with the statement presented by the Minister for Equality of Portugal, made on behalf of the European Union. That is why I would like to concentrate mainly on the latest developments in Bulgaria in the areas of gender equality, development and peace.

It has always been our understanding that the rights of women should be placed within the broader socio-economic and political perspective. In the five-year period after Beijing, the Republic of Bulgaria has achieved considerable progress in the development of civil society and the building of democratic institutions. In this process the Bulgarian Government perceives equality between women and men as a sine qua non of democracy and recognizes that there can be no genuine democracy without the achievement of gender equality. Therefore, the Government, in conjunction with civil society actors, concentrated its efforts to achieve gender equality on certain parallel actions in several spheres at the national and international levels: accession to international legal instruments concerning women's rights, legislative reforms, the adoption of gender-sensitive policies and the elaboration of special programmes for vulnerable groups of the population.

Bulgaria is a State party to the major international instruments on human rights and attaches great importance to the effective implementation of these instruments. In this context, we consider the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women a basic instrument, both in terms of eliminating discrimination against women worldwide and in terms of promoting and protecting women's rights as human rights at the universal level. We share the view that the Optional Protocol to the Convention provides women not only with the necessary legal tool for the protection and promotion of their human rights, but also with concrete procedures for translating these rights into reality.

It is my pleasure and honour to inform the Assembly that two days ago, on Tuesday, 6 June, I signed, on behalf of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This is an expression of our firm conviction that practical and effective measures should be undertaken in order to broaden the legal framework for the protection of the rights set forth in the Convention. Bulgaria attaches utmost importance to the documents adopted by the Beijing Conference on Women. On this basis, in 1996, the Council of Ministers adopted a National Action Plan, aimed at achieving de facto equality in aspects of public life.

In implementing the Beijing Platform for Action the present Government has significantly increased the participation of women in the decision-making process and has integrated them into the higher levels of public administration. Women make up more than 60 per cent of the executive staff of the ministries and about 60 per cent of the senior positions in the State administration in Bulgaria. At the same time, effective ways and means to also involve men in the process of eliminating obstacles to equality by changing the prevailing power structures and stereotypical gender roles are being explored.

Bulgaria fully supports the basic principle that the rights of women are, and have always been, an integral part of human rights. In the Republic of Bulgaria the principles of equality and non-discrimination are constitutionally guaranteed, and all provisions of the Constitution with regard to human rights are directly applicable. In this context, I would like to stress a specific provision of the Bulgarian Constitution which stipulates that the provisions of the international instruments ratified by the Republic of Bulgaria are an integral part of the national legislation and shall have

supremacy over national legislation, unless the latter stipulates otherwise.

There are no limitations of rights based on distinction between the sexes. Neither are there spheres of activity reserved exclusively for either sex. Women and men enjoy equal civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. The Penal, Civil and Family Codes, as well as the Labour Code, guarantee the equality of all persons before the law and their equal opportunity to defend their rights in court in cases of the violation of those rights.

However, the Government and civil society in our country have always been sensitive to the specific needs of women. An intergovernmental working group, in close collaboration with women's non-governmental organizations, is in the process of drafting a law on gender equality.

Specific provisions are included in national legislation with respect to women. Let me provide two examples. The Pension Law sets out a specific retirement procedure for mothers who have many children. The second example is that the Labour Code provides for special rights for women employees relevant to their potential or actual status as mothers, including parental paid leave of up to two years and the possibility for female employees with children up to six years of age to work at home. In the spirit of equality of rights and responsibilities in the family and in raising children, the latter provisions are applicable to both parents.

Vulnerable groups, particularly those likely to experience multiple forms of discrimination, have always been the object of special attention by the Bulgarian Government. A good example is the framework programme for the equal integration of Roma in Bulgarian society, adopted by the Council of Ministers in 1999, which was formulated with the active participation of a number of Roma non-governmental organizations. The programme includes a special section on the Roma woman. The programme pays special attention to equal participation by Roma women in social and economic activities.

We are conscious of the fact that good legislative initiatives and practical measures are insufficient to resolve the problems of the advancement of women and gender equality. Those problems are global and require concerted measures at the regional and international levels. In this context, a task force meeting was held on 2 June, under the auspices of the first lady of the Republic of Bulgaria, entitled the "Southeast European leadership initiative: a dialogue for action". That regional initiative was aimed at outlining strategies to address problems and to transform ideas into everyday action. Representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria took part in that regional meeting. Participants were determined to promote the fulfilment of regional initiatives in the three working areas of the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe: human rights and democratization, economy and security. The measures that were outlined will focus on the efforts of women leaders on the main problems faced by women in the region: poverty, violence against women, and participation in the decision-making process in all spheres of life. As a follow-up, a second regional conference on women in the twenty-first century will be held in November this year in Macedonia.

The Bulgarian Government is also firmly committed to participate further in international and regional cooperation aimed at the prevention and elimination of trafficking in women and forced prostitution. Bulgaria is a participant in the non-governmental La Strada programme for the prevention of trafficking in women in Central and Eastern Europe. Currently, a training programme for specialized police officials dealing with the prevention of violence against women and a campaign initiated by the International Organization for Migration for the prevention of trafficking in women and girls are being implemented in Bulgaria.

We face the challenge of pursuing the translation into action of the legal framework on gender equality and the Beijing Platform for Action, although we are conscious of the fact that this will be a long and difficult process. In this connection, I am convinced that the twenty-third special session will contribute to our common efforts towards achieving gender equality. I would like to assure the Assembly once again of Bulgaria's commitment to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Acting President: I next give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Enrique Candioti, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Argentina.

Mr. Candioti (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The issue of women and gender equality is now on the international agenda and constitutes one of the major challenging forces for the new millennium. This special session is intended to strengthen and enhance the advancement of women's rights — precisely because they are not yet fully respected. Humanity owes all-encompassing recognition to women, and this is obviously the time to provide it.

A priority of the new Argentine Government under President Fernando de la Rúa is to strengthen the human rights achievements made by the international community over the past few decades; the basic treaties in this sphere were incorporated into the Argentine Constitution in 1994. Among those treaties, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been a most important benchmark for setting the highest standards in our country, which reflects a genuine State policy for all sectors of national life. Our signing, in February 2000, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention underscored Argentina's determination to protect women's rights through the use of international monitoring mechanisms.

In the regional framework of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), important progress has been made since 1998 with the establishment of the Specialized Women's Meeting, which was created to formulate recommendations on women's issues to member countries, with the collaboration of regional non-governmental organizations. Five years after Beijing, we are here accompanied by many members of Argentine non-governmental organizations representing all interests and views within civil society, to advocate the promotion and protection of women's rights.

The position of the Argentine Government, as consistently stated in international forums, is inspired by the values that are most precious to all human beings: life, freedom and dignity. The premises of our action in this respect include protecting and defending human life from conception to its natural end; protecting the family as the nucleus of society; recognizing the rights and duties of parents with respect to the education of their children; and affirming the basic responsibility of the State to build a society that is ever more democratic, tolerant, humane and just.

Throughout the world there is violence against women and girls, and there are those who profit from it. Countries are now meeting at Vienna to formulate a protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Public policies in support of the family, which is where the basic rights and values of society are promoted and defended, are a priority for the Argentine Government.

The promotion of women's rights requires that priority be given to education. Argentina's federal education law establishes that the State has a principal responsibility to define the guidelines of educational policy, including the implementation of real equal opportunity for all inhabitants and the rejection of all forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender, and the elimination of all kinds of discriminatory stereotypes in teaching materials.

The dignity of the human person is strengthened by the struggle against poverty, which affects women specifically. This makes it necessary to guarantee their access to credit and production structures, as well as to ensure the shared responsibility of men in supporting the family. Here I must note that my country recently proposed legislation that creates a register of those who fail to make support payments and establishes penalties for such failure.

We also wish to mention a topic that is very dear to the women of the world — adoption. While this session has not considered it, Argentina deems it timely to encourage such consideration, so that Governments, with the participation of the community, can provide information and facilitate procedures encouraging the adoption, or the giving up for adoption, of a girl or boy.

Argentina promotes the shared responsibility of women and men as a guarantee of full gender equality, proceeding from a concept that ensures women's effective participation in society, aware of the inequalities that still affect them. In this framework, we have measures for positive action, such as the quota law, which obliges political parties to include a minimum of 30 per cent of women candidates in the electoral lists. In this respect, we note with satisfaction, as noted in the statistics of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, that the presence of women in Argentine

legislative bodies, both at the federal and provincial levels, has significantly increased.

We also wish to note that the commitment to guarantee the protection of women's human rights includes their sexual and reproductive rights, as is reflected in the policies implemented by our authorities in the form of measures to reduce maternal mortality, to prevent adolescent pregnancy and to protect the maternity and health of women, while ensuring the inalienable right to free and responsible choice regarding when and how many children they wish to have and respect for life and their personal beliefs. All of this is consistent with the values and premises that inspire the position of the Argentine Government.

The National Council of Women, in coordination with all the authorities and responsible organizations at the national, provincial and municipal levels, has drawn up guidelines for the Government action that go beyond the outdated concepts of "policies for women" and have made the subject of women an area of State concern. The National Council will have, in addition to the measures mentioned above, the following principal objectives: to guarantee the effective fulfilment of international treaties on human rights incorporated in the Constitution; to formulate public policies, from a gender perspective, that contribute to overcoming the different forms of discrimination against women, and that promote proper social conditions to guarantee the effective exercise of their rights; to ensure full access for women to comprehensive health care; to intensify prevention, research and information programmes, and to take effective initiatives to deal with diseases that particularly threaten and affect them, such as AIDS, cancer and malnutrition; to prevent and eradicate the sexual and commercial exploitation of girls, boys and adolescents; to train unemployed women to develop non-traditional activities, under the emergency labour programme and the technical and professional training programme for women with low income; and to combat violence against women and guarantee them access to justice, in compliance with the Inter-American Convention of Belem do Para on the punishment, prevention and eradication of violence against women.

The increasing presence of women in the life of the community and in political decisions will clearly be the best reassurance against individual and collective violence, against intolerance, sectarianism and so many other abuses that have tarnished the history of humankind.

Argentina decisively supports the Beijing Platform for Action and pledges its best efforts so that this special session will result in initiatives and commitments that will reaffirm and ensure its fulfilment. Furthermore, we support proper coordination of the different organizations of the United Nations system involved in the topic of gender, which will lead to great efficiency and effectiveness of international action.

The slogan of our Assembly, by highlighting the equation "equality-development-peace", calls on all of us to contribute to the building of a world free of the scourges of backwardness and war, a world that will ensure a life of freedom, security, solidarity and justice for women and for all human beings.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fawzi Bin Abdul Majeed Shobokshi, Chairman of the delegation of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia)[*spoke in Arabic*]: At the outset, I wish to convey, through you, sir, our sincere congratulations to the President of this special session. Saudi Arabia looks forward to a successful outcome of the session. The international community aspires to advance the status of women, in keeping with their positive and pristine nature and the role that God has created for them, without compromising their dignity or their rights, in accordance with God's laws.

Today we are meeting for a comprehensive review and assessment of the Beijing Platform for Action in order to gauge and reinforce its strengths and to measure its shortcomings, taking into account each society's own characteristics, values and cultural legacies, which are embedded in its conscience over succeeding generations. Nevertheless, we realize that there are universal values that should prevail in all our diverse societies, regardless of their cultural heritage. Because these values are in keeping with God-given sound judgement, we mean them to be the values of right, justice and equality, without discrimination on the basis of race, color or creed.

God the Almighty honoured Holy Mecca, which was made his age-old abode and the seat of revelation. The Islamic message was revealed by God to the Prophet — May Peace be upon Him — who delivered the message, fulfilled the ambition and taught the Muslim nation its concepts, values, laws and principles, foremost of which are the dignity and rights of man.

God blessed Saudi Arabia by making its leaders custodians of the two holy shrines, trustees of the Islamic holy sites and advocates of justice and righteousness, so Saudi Arabia embraced the Holy Koran as a Constitution, the precepts of the Prophet — Peace be upon Him — as a way of life and the Islamic precepts and religious values as a principle. Islam granted women undiminished rights.

In the Koran, God said: "And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them." (The Holy Koran, II, 228). The prophet — May praise be upon him — said: Verily women are the sisters of men. There is balance with regard to women in Islam that preserves their inheritance, education, ownership rights and dignity while stressing their duty to demonstrate their virtue and to protect society, the main responsibility being to build happy families, which form the nucleus of society, without depriving them of their physical and psychological attributes.

We believe that a family based on legal marriage between a man and a woman is the most important foundation for society. Men and women are partners in all fields of life, on the basis of equality and the values that preserve their dignity. Proceeding from this premise, Saudi Arabia attaches great importance to women because of her essential role in building the family.

We have developed plans providing women with the opportunity for advancement, economically, educationally and socially. My Government attaches great importance to social, educational and cultural policies aimed at achieving advanced human development for women so as to enable them to participate effectively with men in all areas of life and to provide them with the opportunity for education in science and the humanities at all levels.

Ninety-five per cent of girls are educated, the percentage is the same as that for boys. The Government provides scholarships and housing for student girls, in keeping with their essential requirements. The sums spent on education constitutes about one quarter of the budget of the State — it is one of the highest percentages worldwide and represents 9 per cent of our gross national product. Women have the opportunity to gain access to jobs in keeping with their aptitudes and the preservation of their dignity. They work in all sectors of the government and participate in cultural, educational, medical, nursing and social work, as well as in administrative and academic leadership. In order to enable women to assume their responsibilities in society or within the family and to increase their opportunities for employment, the State is seeking to create and open up job opportunities for women. In this respect, we have introduced part-time jobs at full salaries for women in certain fields.

Together with these efforts to ensure a decent life for women, we also attach great importance to medical and social care for women and girls. Such programmes take place in both rural and urban areas within the framework of my country's plans to implement the principle of health care for all as a national strategy and to ensure and support the continuation of our social development, which exceeds by far that of many other countries of the world. Social security programmes also ensure that women can lead decent lives in the event that they lose the head of the household or become disabled.

Saudi women have complete freedom to own, sell and purchase shares and stocks and have access to credit, through concessional loans, from funds created by the Government. These interest-free, 25-year soft loans enable them to start their own businesses or to own property. This policy is in accordance with the Islamic shariah, which grants women legal rights from birth, as well as independent financial status and the enjoyment of all rights, including the right to inherit and to obtain a divorce in the event that married life becomes unbearable, as well as to custody and alimony.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has reaffirmed its opposition to discrimination by acceding to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In Saudi Arabia, we are eager for women to enjoy all their rights and fulfil all their duties, including the right to education and work and protection from poverty. In addition, the State protects the freedom of all in accordance with the Islamic shariah and Islamic practices and laws, provided they do not contravene general order and decency.

In the context of our interest in women's issues, the Consultative Council has recently discussed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopting it on 7 May 2000 during regular session number 71.

We live in a time of interdependent and interrelated interests and benefits. Humanity is looking

forward to a century in which constructive cooperation, human brotherhood and mutual respect and equality will prevail. It behoves us to take account of and implement all international conventions and instruments while maintaining full respect for national sovereignty and the national, religious, cultural and historical characteristics of individual societies. At a time when crises, conflicts and wars are proliferating and the number of victims, primarily women and children, is becoming harder to count, we must adhere to noble humanitarian and religious values in order to transcend the domination of man over his brother and in order to rid ourselves of the wrong concepts that led to the commercial exploitation of women, which in turn led to the disintegration of the family and society as a whole.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Li Hyong Chol, Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Li Hyong Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election as President of the twenty-third special session of The General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". My delegation appreciates the efforts made by the Secretariat to ensure the success of this special session.

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, considerable achievements have been made through active endeavours to ensure the advancement of women. In this regard, the report of the Secretary-General as contained in document E/CN.6/2000/PC/2 deserves attention. As the report states, this special session should give priority to action-oriented measures to further achieve the goals of the 12 critical areas of concern which are spelt out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

My delegation is proud of the fact that, in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, women's issues are given the utmost priority in social progress and that a satisfactory solution to that effect has been made through relevant legislation and policy measures. The enactment of the law on gender equality, proclaimed in 1947, was a historic event that brought about fundamental change by eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, which had been a root cause of all the misfortunes and sufferings of women in olden times. Having a firm legal basis through the promulgation of this law, the equal rights of women have been further guaranteed through the state measures and social policies that have been taken in conformity with the benevolent policy introduced by the great leader President Kim Il Sung and carried on by the great General Kim Jong Il.

The socialist Constitution and family law of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are also important legislative measures that lay out in greater detail the articles of previous laws so that women, having equal rights with men, can freely participate in activities in the political, social and economic fields.

Today in my country, there are a significant number of women deputies to the Supreme People's Assembly and female army officers, scientists and managers of enterprises and farms. They are playing an important role in politics, the military, the economy and other spheres and are leading worthwhile lives with social respect and affection. In addition, women of my country enjoy full paid maternity leave of more than 150 days and those who have mothered many children are provided with additional benefits from the State. Indeed, it is praiseworthy that the women of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are demonstrating their brilliant skills in state politics, social life and economic construction at such an important historical juncture as today, when the army-first policy of the great General Kim Jong Il's function of the National Defense Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, has been successfully launched, thereby expediting progress towards building a powerful nation displaying its national dignity throughout the world.

My delegation attaches particular importance to the solution of the issue of violence against women, to which international attention has been drawn in recent years. In this regard, we are greatly concerned by the severe violence against vulnerable women arising from the negative impact of globalization, armed conflicts, political pressure and economic sanctions.

In the forums of the United Nations, such as the Conferences on women, it has been urged that greater attention be paid to the protection of women's rights, and in particular to ending violence against women. However, violence against women, to our regret, has not been eliminated and incidents of more serious concern have sometimes been witnessed. This is above

all, attributable to the political perception that issues concerning women may be regarded as a means for achieving unjustifiable objectives.

The world is well aware of Japan's past crime of forcing many Asian and European women, including over 200,000 Korean women and girls, into serving the Japanese army as sex slaves. It was a great crime against humanity, with the intentional involvement of the Japanese Government and military authorities and has thus has aroused the strong condemnation of the international community.

Finding the proper solution to the issue of "comfort women" is one of the major international issues in the process of seeking a comprehensive settlement of women's issues and an apology and compensation are prerequisites to this end. Stubborn opposition to apologizing and to providing compensation for past crimes and a refusal to seek a solution should be condemned internationally.

Today, in Japan, incidents of violence against and insults to resident Korean women and girls, for the simple reason that they are Koreans and wear Korean national clothes, have been observed time and again. The skirts of resident Korean women and girls are torn in broad daylight on the streets. Such violence against women causes serious concern. Similarly, all forms of violence against Korean women perpetrated by United States soldiers in South Korea, including rape, murder, insults and so on, should be stopped at once. Unless such issues are fully resolved, international efforts to denounce and prevent violence against women, including sexual slavery in armed conflict, can never be effective.

My delegation is of the view that there should be no exception in criminalizing any kind of violence against women and that those responsible should accordingly be brought to justice. The current special session should pay particular attention to ensuring moral and material compensation to the victims of immeasurable insults and sexual violence in the past.

My delegation reaffirms that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to advance with a firm policy of promoting the well-being and privilege of women and that it will fully implement the commitments of the Fourth World Conference on Women. In doing so, it will make its contribution to the efforts of the international community to put an end to all forms of inequalities and injustices against women.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jacques Louis Boisson, Chairman of the delegation of Monaco.

Mr. Boisson (Monaco) *(spoke in French)*: At the outset, on behalf of the Government of the Principality, I congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election to the presidency of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. In its capacity as Vice-President and as a member of the Bureau, the Principality of Monaco and its delegation are ready to support him unreservedly and to help him succeed in his lofty mission.

The picture one might draw of women in the year 2000 is quite different from that drawn five years ago at Beijing and still more so from anything that might have been imagined at the first World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in July 1975.

Does it mean that the objectives set — all the objectives — have been achieved? Certainly not. While progress has been remarkable, serious obstacles to further progress remain. Women too often must still confront poverty, powerful traditional and environmental constraints, difficulties of access to education and training and thus to the political and economic power through which societies change and define their evolution.

The authorities of Monaco, aware of these difficulties, have taken legislative, economic and social measures to strengthen the recognition of the rights of women living and working in Monaco. At the international level, they have encouraged humanitarian associations, particularly through financial assistance, to work to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged women and girls in the countries of the South.

Our national report broadly sets forth the initiatives that have been undertaken. I wish to mention some that appear to be significant and strongly to reiterate our commitment to the principles and recommendations that the international community adopted five years ago and which it is preparing to confirm on the basis of its solid and fruitful experience.

A significant date in the political life of Monaco was certainly 17 December 1962, when the present Constitution was proclaimed. Article 33 of this Constitution accorded to women, upon reaching legal age, the right to vote and to be elected to the

Communal Council and the National Council, Monaco's Parliament.

The possibility thus offered to women to accede to political power would bring with it a profound evolution in attitudes and lifestyles for the entire population. This evolution continues. Recently, the National Council proposed a resolution, which was unanimously adopted by the Parliament, whereby the Government of the Principality is asked to modify some of the provisions of the civil code regarding family law, thus supporting the social movement.

The role of education and professional training has been and continues to be decisive. They allow women to participate in greater numbers with competence and authority at the decision-making level of Government. The educational policy, free compulsory primary education, non-discriminatory access to general and professional secondary education and professional training and the facilitation of university education have borne fruit. A fairer distribution of responsibilities among men and women exists today at the heart of Monegasque society.

Today many women occupy important political positions. The Mayor of Monaco is a woman. A quarter of the members of the Communal Council and the National Council are women. At the administrative level, we are happy to say that such important departments as those of the budget and treasury, national education, youth and sports, health and social welfare, economic growth and housing today are headed very ably by women. Two women are advisers in the Cabinet of Ministers of State of the head of Government. Many hold key positions in the three ministerial departments. They represent 52 per cent of the overall staff of the civil service, 35 per cent of whom are directors or heads of services. Therefore, they are closely linked, on a daily basis, to the drafting and implementation of governmental policies.

Women also play a preponderant role in the framework of civil society, and particularly in charitable institutions. They are also very active in the private sector. They hold 46 per cent of service-sector positions. They are also the majority in trade, financial activities, health and social welfare.

With regard to employment, men and women have the same rights. They receive identical pay. Women, nonetheless, benefit from special protective measures: certain dangerous forms of employment are prohibited for women. Aside from pre- and post-natal leave, the law allows mothers to suspend their work contract in order to raise a child, and they are given priority when it comes to re-employment. Those who wish to continue working have childcare services available to them. Financial aid can be given to single mothers or to those who wish to dedicate themselves exclusively to caring for their families.

In addition to these measures, we are happy to note that there is a new mentality in Monaco that should lead to greater balance between men and women, based upon real equality, mutual respect and a recognition of the rights and capacities of each individual. The Government of Monaco is trying to contribute regularly and substantially to improving the conditions of disadvantaged women and girls and those living in extreme hardship. Besides annual payments in the form of voluntary contributions to various United Nations programmes, that assistance also takes the form of assistance to non-governmental organizations with headquarters in Monaco, such as the World Association of Friends of Children (AMADE), Monaco Aid and Support and Mission Childhood.

Among the most exemplary achievements with which many women are associated are shelters to assist street girls avoid the poverty, delinquency, drugs and prostitution that threaten them; children's and mothers' protection centres; re-education and reintegration centres for disabled women; professional training workshops for girls; primary schooling exclusively for girls; and maternity hospitals and a sex education centre.

Medical initiatives also deserve to be highlighted, such as assistance to women with leprosy or AIDS in many African regions, training in public health and the struggle against nutritional blindness in children. In the latter case, African mothers receive retinol and vitamin A, or learn to grow the vitamin-rich vegetables vital to preventing this disease. This international programme, called Tears Without Eyes, is carried out with AMADE and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as is the "School of the four winds", an institute from which many girl children benefit , that is adapted to the way of life and work of street children.

In conclusion, we must recognize, unfortunately, that in spite of the efforts made, equality between men and women is still far from being achieved. By recalling the limitations that a rapid improvement in a

situation often encounters, this session provides the opportunity to reaffirm goals and made them really possible.

My country's authorities and many of my compatriots are fully convinced that it is vital to pursue our efforts and to accelerate the transformation of societies through the ever-more effective collaboration of women so that the common objectives we set for ourselves five years ago will be attained as soon as possible. We hope that greater harmony will come about within humankind, between men and women, and will contribute to establishing more harmonious balance in relations between nations.

The Declaration adopted in Luxembourg by the International Organization of La Francophonie, which has been distributed as an official document, represents a guide and a precious source of inspiration. We look forward to Minister Alimata Salambéré's speaking on Friday on behalf of the Secretary-General of La Francophonie, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

The Acting President: I call on Ms. Eka Ebralidze, representative of Georgia.

Ms. Ebralidze (Georgia): It is my great pleasure to address this session and report on the efforts of the Government of Georgia to promote gender equality and the advancement of women since the Fourth World Conference in Beijing.

Georgia gained independence in 1991 and has spent the last decade overcoming internal conflicts and economic and financial problems. It remains a country in transition to a democratic society. In 1995 Georgia adopted a Constitution, desired by the Georgian people to establish a democratic social order, market economy and law-based State. From an official point of view, the prerequisites for women and men are the same in all essential respects in Georgia.

In addition to passing new, gender-neutral legislation, the Government of Georgia has taken a number of steps specifically directed at promoting gender equality and the advancement of women.

On 22 September 1994, Georgia joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 1995, the Georgian delegation participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women and signed the Beijing Platform for Action. On 20 February 1998, the President of Georgia established the State Commission on the elaboration of State policy for women's advancement. In June 1998, the President of Georgia approved a National Plan of Action for improving the condition of women. A joint project on women in development sponsored by the Government of Georgia and the United Nations Development Programme has been operating in Georgia since 1997.

With regard to the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, Georgia's priorities are the related problems of poverty and internal conflict. Two hundred fifty thousand internally displaced persons from the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are currently living in temporary accommodation throughout Georgia. Among them are 150,000 women and children. The health of those women and children is at serious risk, and the Government has made health assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons a top priority.

Based on recommendations made by the twenty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, held in August 1999, the President of Georgia issued a decree on measures to strengthen the protection of women's rights in Georgia. That decree obliges different ministries to work towards eliminating direct and indirect discrimination against women, carry out gender analyses of Georgian legislation and textbooks, ensure women's involvement in negotiating resolutions to the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and develop special programmes aimed at helping refugees and internally displaced persons.

The Commission on the advancement of women has developed, and the President has approved, a National Plan to combat the various forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, violence in the workplace, ethnic violence directed against women and ecological violence affecting women and children.

The Government has also considered establishing a department of women's issues and creating gender units within governmental structures. Unfortunately, progress has not been made on these initiatives due to current budgetary constraints.

My Government's overall policy objective is to develop a society in which women and men have the same rights and opportunities. As I have just described, some positive steps have been taken with regard to dividing and redistributing power between men and

women, but the reality of women's low rate of participation in political and economic life shows that women's roles and participation in the decision-making process is not satisfactory.

In the executive branch of Government there are currently 2 female ministers out of a total of 19, the Ministers for ecology and culture. Women hold a small but growing percentage of other executive branch positions, such as deputy ministers and diplomats.

In the legislative branch, 1,349 women became members of local authorities in the 1998 local elections, the first local elections held in independent Georgia. That number represents only 12.5 per cent of the total. Few women hold high positions in local government.

In the parliamentary elections held in 1999, 17 women were elected out of a total of 235 members of Parliament, representing 7.2 per cent of the total. Two women members of Parliament were elected chairpersons of parliamentary committees, namely, the committee on foreign affairs and the committee on human rights.

Serious reform of the judiciary has been carried out in Georgia only during the past two years. Under the new qualification system, 40 per cent of newly appointed judges are women. Twelve new Supreme Court judges were elected by the Parliament in June 1999, six of whom — 50 per cent — were women.

We believe that it is vital for our society to rectify these imbalances, in both the public and private sectors, so as to take advantage of the expertise and experience of women. This forum provides a valuable opportunity to coordinate with, and to learn from, the experiences of other Governments that have faced this challenge.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Teresa Efua Asangono, Minister for Women's Integration and Social Affairs of Equatorial Guinea.

Mrs. Asangono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, allow me at the outset to extend to the President our warm congratulations on his illustrious election.

I am grateful for the opportunity that has been given to me at this forum to express the warm greetings of the nation of Equatorial Guinea and of its President, Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, to the peoples of all the countries of the world represented here, and in particular to the people of the United States of America, who have received us with such kindness.

I am also grateful for the opportunity to participate in this special session of the General Assembly to make our contribution to the consideration of a topic of vital importance, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". We commend the United Nations on its initiative to convene almost all of the countries of the world to reflect upon global policies on gender equality after the holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. We would like to express our appreciation to the Preparatory Committee for the excellent work it has done on its report.

The history of discrimination against and social exclusion of women is a long one. The problem is more structural than situational in nature, more global than local and more general than specific. That does not mean that its causes are the same in all or most countries.

We have listened to the various very interesting statements made here. In our country we have noticed that the problem of women in society has a great deal to do with increased social stratification by gender and local patrilineal societies. From that perspective we can say that institutionalized discrimination does not exist in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. What does exist is attitudinal discrimination. Consequently, and independently from the legislative action of the State, a new form and method of socialization of girls and boys is currently under way.

Communications media are informing and forming society. Schools and families, as the main agents of socialization, have assumed roles and behaviours to eliminate the obstacles on the path of full equality. It is indeed worth noting that the enjoyment of equal human rights by men and women is a principle that was accepted by 171 countries at the World Conference on Human Rights held in June 1993.

In this framework, the State policies of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea have as their objectives: equal access for women to basic social services, including education and health; equal opportunities to participate in political and economic decision-making; equal pay for equal work; equal protection under the

law, the elimination of discrimination on the basis of gender, the elimination of violence against women, and equal rights in every area of public life. Nevertheless, the efforts that my country's Government has undertaken will be insufficient if they are not accompanied by concrete measures at the national and international levels.

The lower enrolment of women in secondary education is the result of a high dropout rate, due in turn to a high frequency of early marriage. Other factors that have kept women in poverty are the lack of an international framework for development cooperation and the weakness of the non-profit volunteer sector.

But with the aim of bringing about structural reform, equitable social development and fair economic growth, the Government adopted a medium-term economic strategy for 1997 to 2001 at a national economic conference held at Bata from 8 to 13 September 1997. The purpose of that conference was to enhance good governance and administration and to allocate resources to improve the quality of life for our people on a fair and lasting basis.

Similarly, my Government has held a conference on rural development and food security. The strategic guidelines adopted at that conference encompass various recommendations of the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development and of the 1995 Beijing Conference as they relate to access to and use of high-quality reproductive health services by all women of Equatorial Guinea, to greater awareness by policy-makers, and to promoting gender issues with a view to reducing the disparities between men and women.

Issues relating to women and development are a priority for the Government of Equatorial Guinea. To respond to the needs of women, we have established a Ministry of Women's Integration and Social Affairs. The ministry's overall focus includes promoting human development through participation and the promotion of equality; organization, administration, coordination and implementation of policies, plans, programmes and activities for the advancement of women and women's rights; implementation of a gender strategy including the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and full and fair access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance, the ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and relevant technology. The access of women to decision-making circles is reflected by the significant presence of Equatorial Guinea women in Government, parliament and the supreme court, as well as in high public-order and foreign diplomatic posts.

Yet despite these efforts, women continue to face inequality. My Government recently adopted law 6/1999 of 6 December 1999, which amended some provisions of law 2/1999 governing national employment policies, and which set aside for women 15 per cent of overall jobs in businesses in Equatorial Guinea.

Globalization requires national awareness of the problems and difficulties faced by all human beings: men and women, boys and girls, young and old, African, Asian and European. Globalization must have no winners or losers. We are convinced that unifying criteria and coordinating the action of Governments, international organizations and the non-profit volunteer sector, including both public and private entities, will enable us to overcome the problems that affect nearly all women in the world.

We thank the organizers of this special session for their kind invitation, and for the help and facilities they have made available.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.